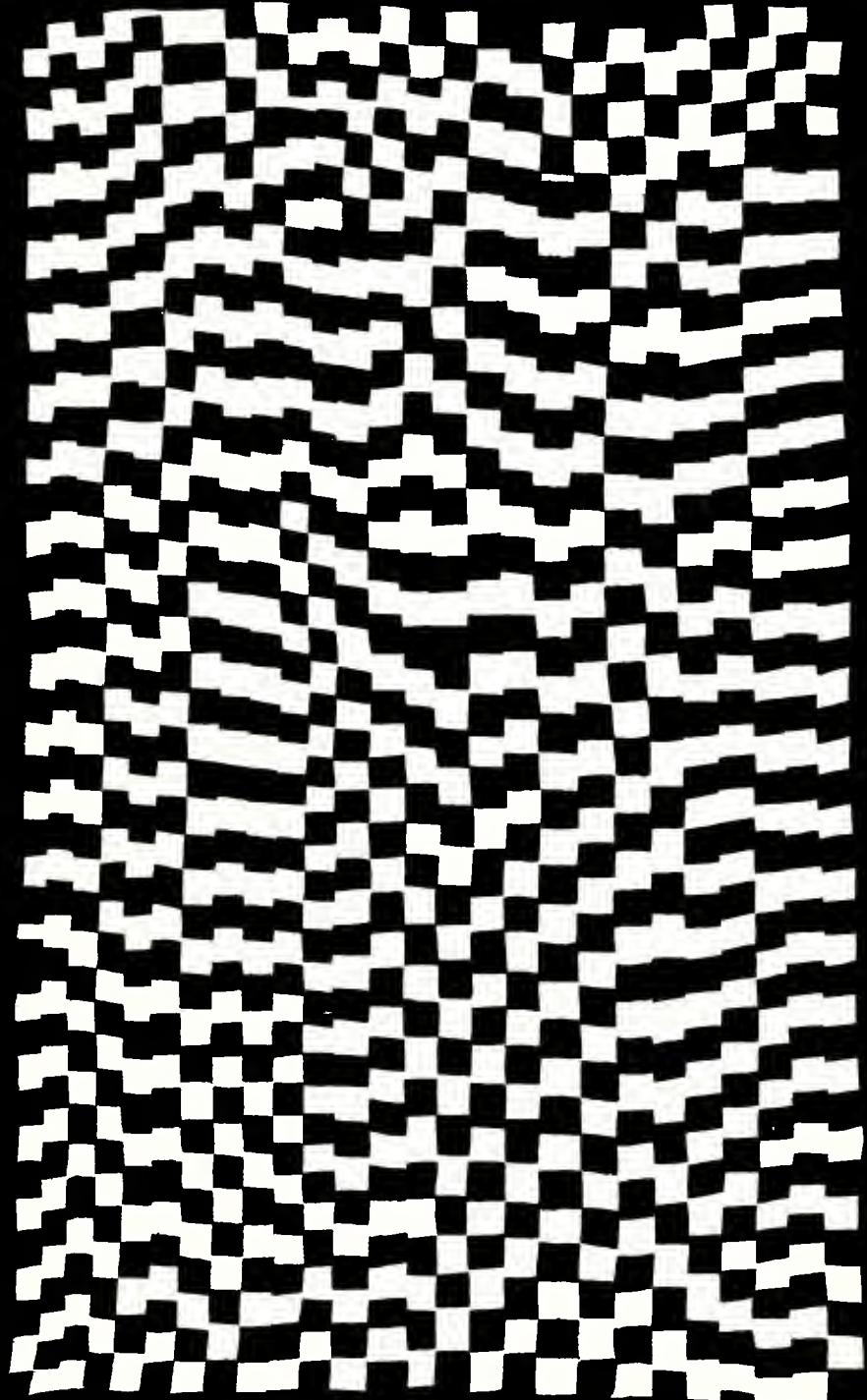


MODELS in the MIND

African Prototypes in American Patchwork

ELI
LEON



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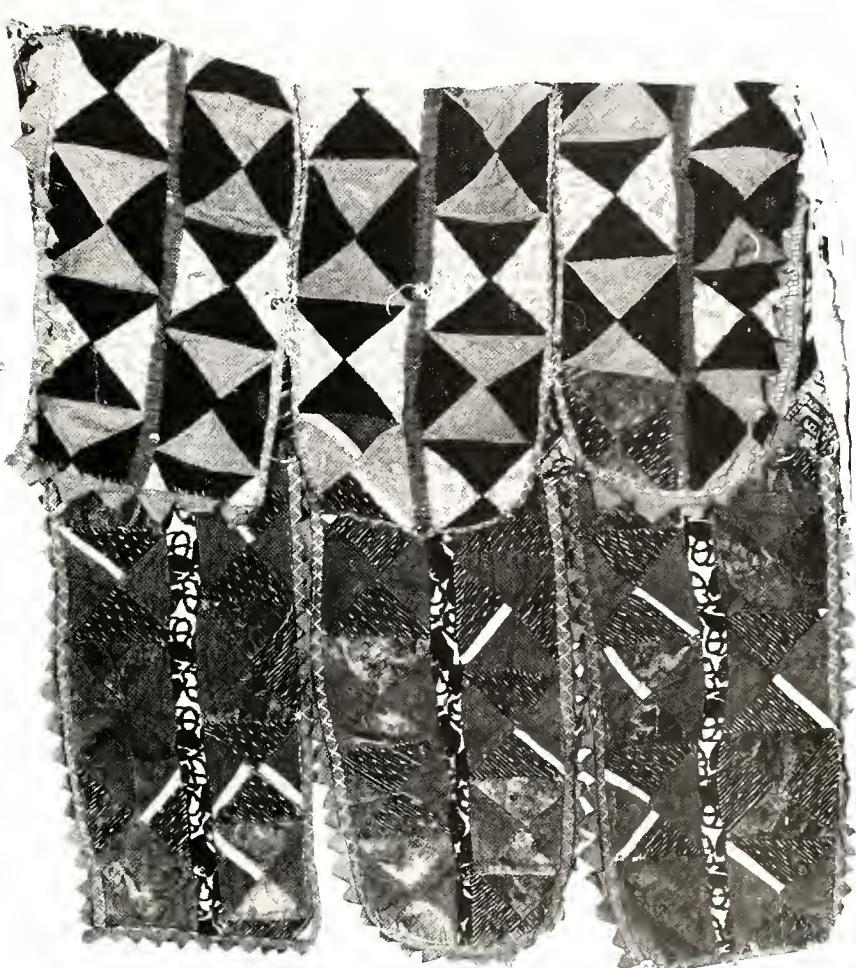
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MODELS in the MIND

African Prototypes in American Patchwork

ELI LEON

January 15-
March 29, 1992



Exhibition Credits

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MODELS in the MIND

African Prototypes in American Patchwork

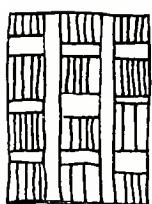
Kuba women use neither sample patterns nor sketches on the cloth; they are working from models in their minds.

Monni Adams

West and Central Africa were centers of textile art prior to the forced migration of Africans to Europe and America. Sophisticated textile traditions—many of which have been maintained to this day—were endemic in the areas from which these people were taken. Motifs, organizational principles, and esthetic values integral to African patchworked and strip-woven cloths can be found in American patchwork. Such correspondences between African and American textile traditions suggest an African influence on the American patchwork quilt.

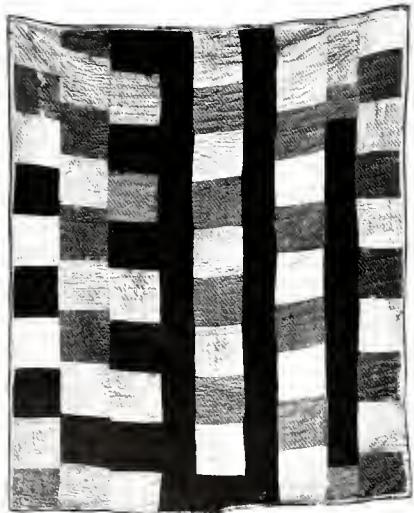
African patchworked relics and patchwork still done as part of enduring traditions, notably in ritual costumes and particularly in the barkcloth ceremonial skirts of the Kuba of Zaire,¹ exhibit basic elements of design and organization found in American patchwork. Barkcloth, once prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa, virtually necessitates patching in its manufacture.² Woven cloth, including traditional stripwoven African cloth in which narrow lengths of handwoven fabric are sewn together to make larger textiles, supplanted the less durable barkcloth over time,³ but stripwoven textiles also exhibit fundamental design and organizational correspondences to American patchwork. Might stripweaving have borrowed styles from older African patchwork forms?

Some aspects of African stripwoven cloth which appear to have been transformed into American patchwork are functional in patchwork, but unnecessary in weaving. In stripwoven cloth, unfigured (plain) strips may alternate with figured (patterned) strips as the strips are sewn together and, within strips, unfigured divider bars may alternate with figured squares or rectangles.⁴ Similarly, in one style of American strip-





1 | *Kuba ceremonial skirt of barkcloth and raffia, detail.*



2 | *Strip, anonymous.*

constructed quilt, “solid” (unpieced) strips alternate with pieced strips and, within strips, “solid” divider bars alternate with pieced squares or rectangles (see figs. 25, 29, 31, 34). Such alternation strengthens pieced cloth but serves only an esthetic function in weaving.⁵ Thus, styles in African stripweaving borrowed from patchwork might have been ripe for reincarnation in the American quilt.

Patchwork, however, may also have taken a more direct route to America from Africa. The Kuba assembled strips of alternating dark and light rectilinear patches ranging from more-or-less uniform to quite variable in shape⁶ and sometimes organized these strips into “blocks” (the square or rectangular “block” of pieced fabric is the unit of design for many American patchwork quilts). This spectrum of options appears also in American quilts; African-American patchwork, in particular, embraces both the more and the less regular forms.

A nineteenth-century (c.1870-90) strip quilt found at a fleamarket in Garrison, Texas, (fig. 2) shows strips of somewhat irregular, alternating dark and light rectangles separated by relatively “solid” strips. Like other prototypical variations on this quintessentially African-American format (see, for example, fig. 12), this anonymous quilt has a decidedly African look.⁷

Strips of irregular rectangles, reminiscent of both a nineteenth-century patchwork Kuba skirt (fig. 1), a patchwork Egungun masquerade costume,⁸ and a stripwoven Hausa cloth (fig. 7) are basic to the work of contemporary quiltmaker, Rosie Lee Tompkins.⁹ In her *Strip* (fig. 9), rows of alternating red and black rectangles run the full length of the quilt—with improvisational exceptions, but Tompkins sometimes organizes short strips into blocks as in the Kuba example.¹⁰

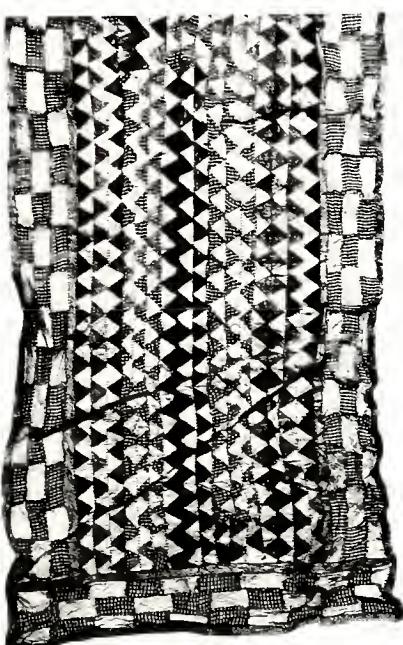
Tompkins had no knowledge of Kuba or Egungun patchwork, but her mother pieced strips of irregular rectangles into blocks for the quilts Tompkins helped make when she



3 | Stripwoven cloth, detail.



4 | Stripwoven Kente cloth, detail.



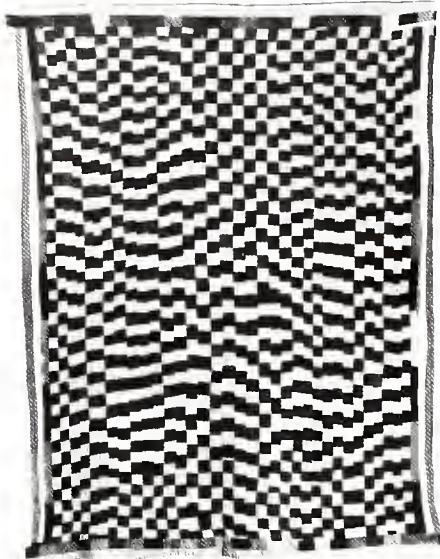
5 | Kuba ceremonial skirt of barkcloth and gingham, detail.

was growing up in rural eastern Arkansas. Thus carried in memory—transmitted from generation to generation without printed instructions—patchwork esthetics and technology had the potential, even under the extreme adversity of the African-American experience, to survive the Atlantic crossing and thrive on this continent.

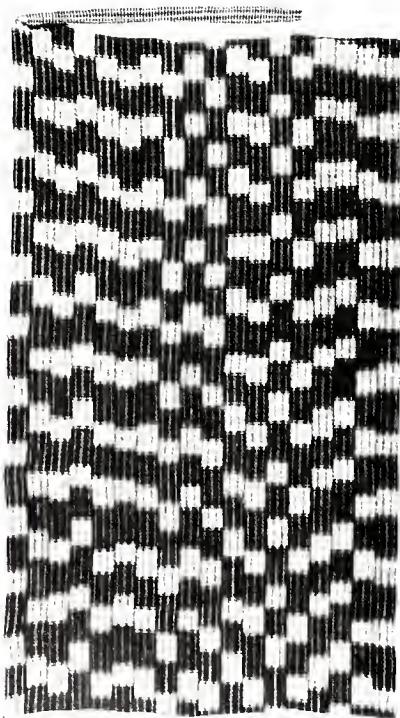
Afro-traditional¹¹ quiltmakers organize strips of rectilinear patches into an unending variety of striking designs. Ernestine Jordan has “compounded” (grouped together) like-colored strips for her *Stamp Quilt* (her name, fig.10); Bettie Phillips has arranged strips around a central medallion of pale blue fabric for her *Checkerboard* (her name, fig.11); Cora Lee Hall Brown (*Strip*, fig.12)¹² and Carrie Lewis (*Compound Strip*, fig.13), using striped fabric, have augmented their quilts’ irregularity by allowing the stripes to fall where they may. Occasional stripes running perpendicular to the dominant direction, according to Lewis, are quite acceptable. The shift to the irregular alignment of the fabric squares at the borders of her quilt was incidental—she just let it happen—but she liked the effect.

Maple Swift’s *Bars* (fig. 8) and Mary Lue Brown’s *Strip* (fig. 6) may be either direct descendants of prototypical African patchwork or transformations of African stripweaving patterns—themselves derived from patchwork—back into the medium of patchwork. Compare Swift’s *Bars* to stripwoven cloths from the Ivory Coast¹³ (fig. 3) and Ghana (fig. 4)¹⁴ and Brown’s *Strip* (fig. 12) to Hausa (fig. 7) and Yoruba¹⁵ cloths.

African patchwork also employs strips of alternating dark and light triangles,¹⁶ a motif found in woven cloth, wood carving, wall painting, and throughout African surface design, sometimes representing the leopard and the multiplicity of its spots.¹⁷ A nineteenth-century patchwork Kuba ceremonial skirt (fig. 5) shows compounded strips of contrasting bark-cloth triangles alternating with strip clusters of barkcloth and imported gingham triangles. An interesting feature of this



6 | *Strip*, Mary Lue Brown,
c. 1940.



7 | *Stripwoven cloth*, Hausa.

textile is a shift from barkcloth to gingham near the center of the skirt (at the cut-off end of this detail) in each of the five groupings of strips. Arbie Williams makes a similar shift in color near the centers of the border strips of her *Triple Irish Chain Look-alike* (fig. 42).

Improvisational color changes at the centers of single borders in quilts by Ernestine Jordan and Maudra Walker (figs. 10, 29) were probably adaptations to the fabric available, but the material on hand could have been arranged in a multitude of ways; the quiltmakers were not restricted to the split-center solution. Improvisation does not occur in an esthetic vacuum. Traditional qualities in African and African-American patchwork inform spontaneous esthetic decisions.

Strips of triangles grace many Afro-traditional quilts. Willia Ette Graham bordered her *Rocky Road to Kansas Medallion* (fig. 14) with them. Charles Cater alternated strips of triangular patchwork with unpieced white strips in his *Triangle Strip* (fig. 15).¹⁸ Arbie Williams placed alternate strips of triangles in the center of her *Triangle Strip Medallion* (fig. 17).

In stripwoven African textiles, design elements were woven into strip “modules” (regularized units of construction and design). Despite the American quiltmaker’s lack of an ongoing familiarity with African traditions, elements of design *pieced* into strip modules often result in uncanny similarities between stripwoven African textiles and American quilts. An anonymous nineteenth-century *Triangle Strip* (fig. 16) shows a number of characteristics found in African cloths. An esthetic of alternation is followed, white alternating with colored triangles within strips and red-and-white strips alternating with strips in which variously colored (but not red) triangles alternate with white triangles. The non-reds are organized within their modular strips to form, upon assembly, “cross-strip” bands (widthwise stripes¹⁹ running across the lengthwise strips) in a bilaterally symmetrical color arrangement, as in African stripwoven cloths

8 | *Bars*

Maple Swift
c. 1976



9

Strip

Pieced by Rosie Lee Tompkins, 1983

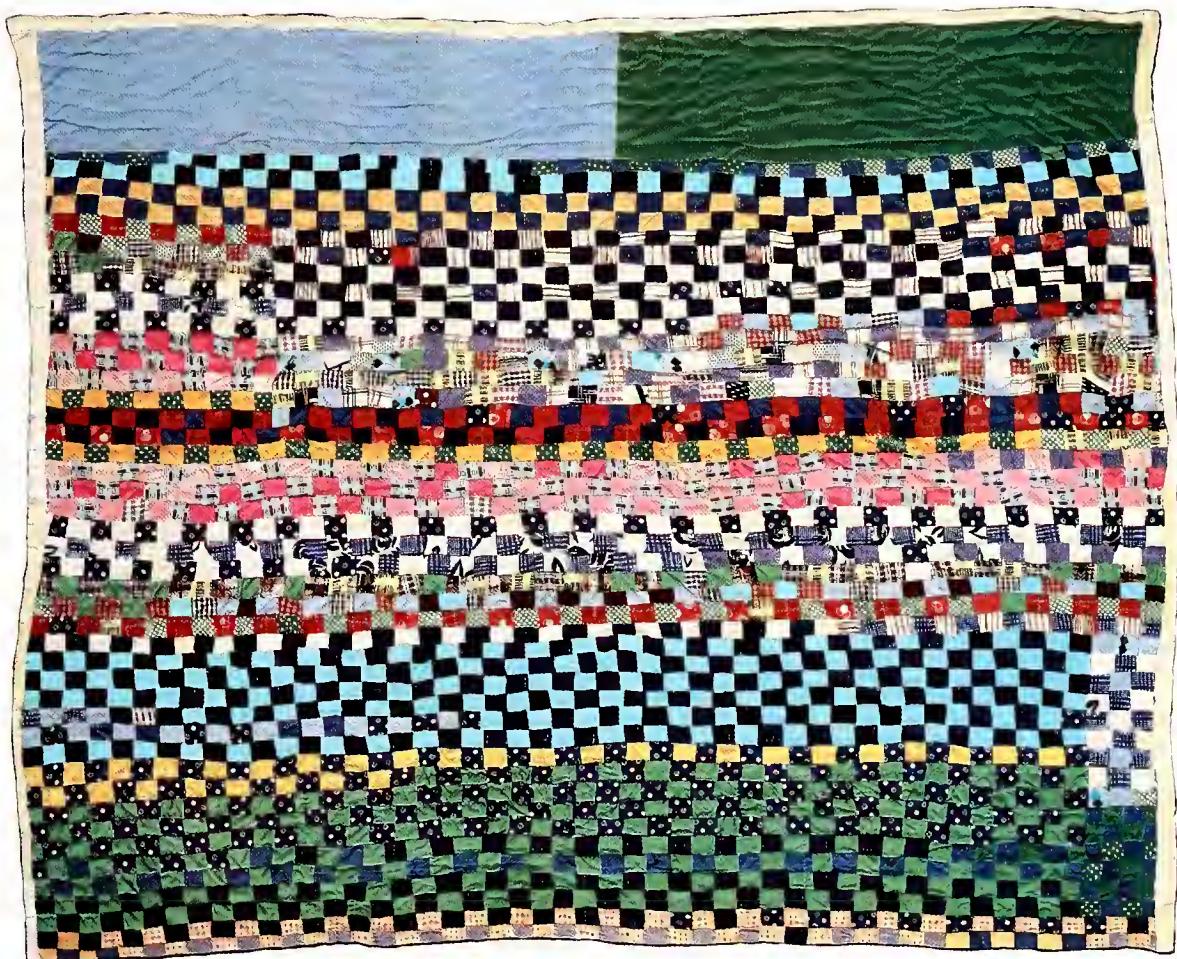
Quilted by Willia Ette Graham, 1985



10

Stamp

*Ernestine Jordan
1973-74*



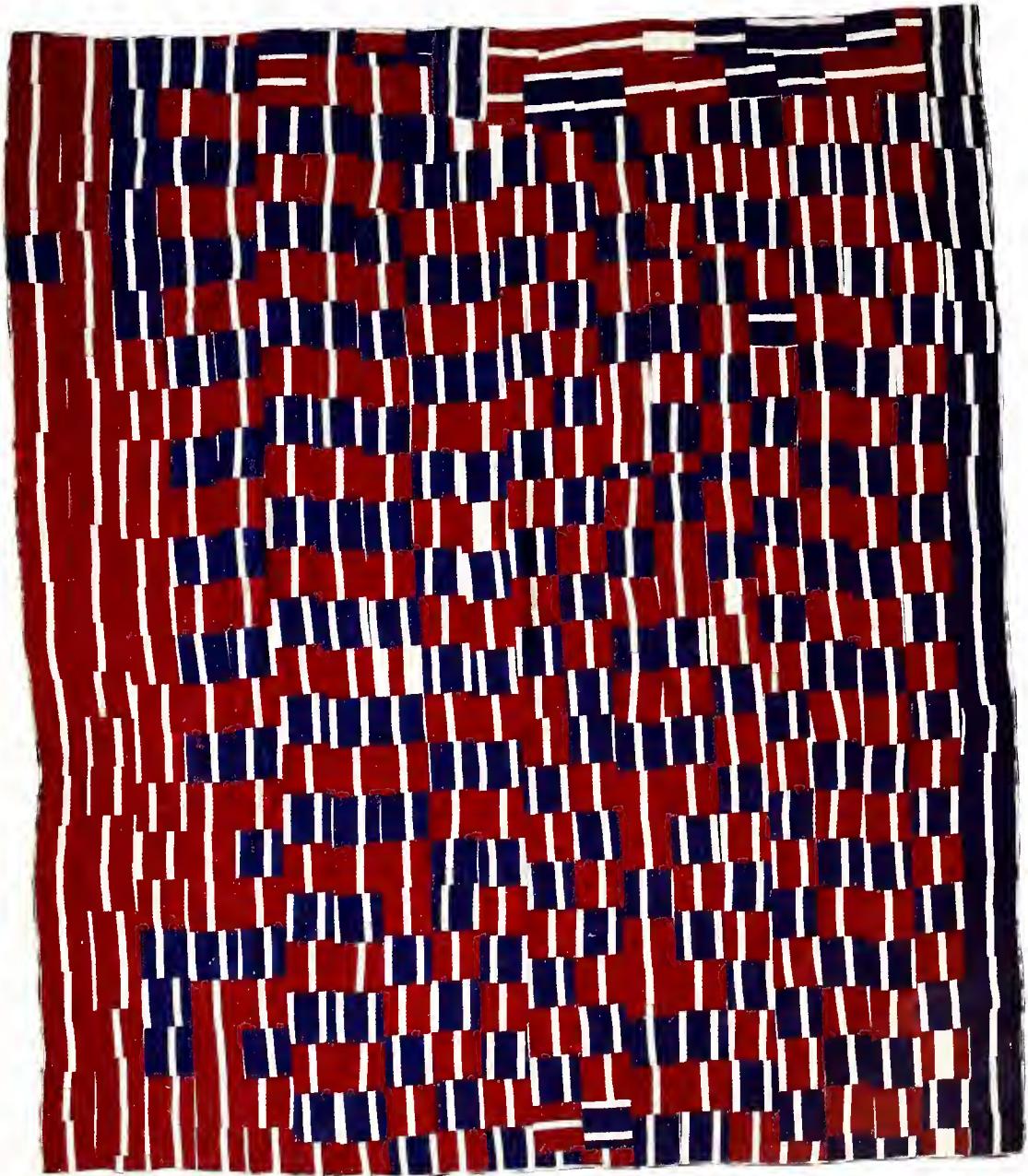
11 | *Checkerboard*

Bettie Phillips
1991



Pieced by Cora Lee Hall Brown, c. 1980

Quilted by Willia Ette Graham, 1985



Compound Strip

Pieced by Carrie Sue Lewis, 1989

Quilted by Rose R. McDowell, 1991



14

Rocky Road to Kansas Medallion

Willia Ette Graham
1984



15

Triangle Strip

Pieced by Charles Cater, 1985

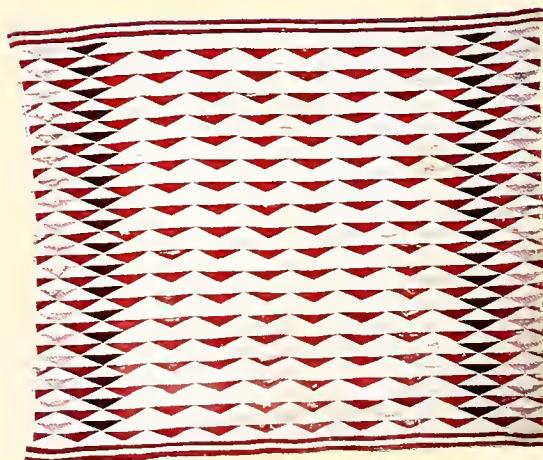
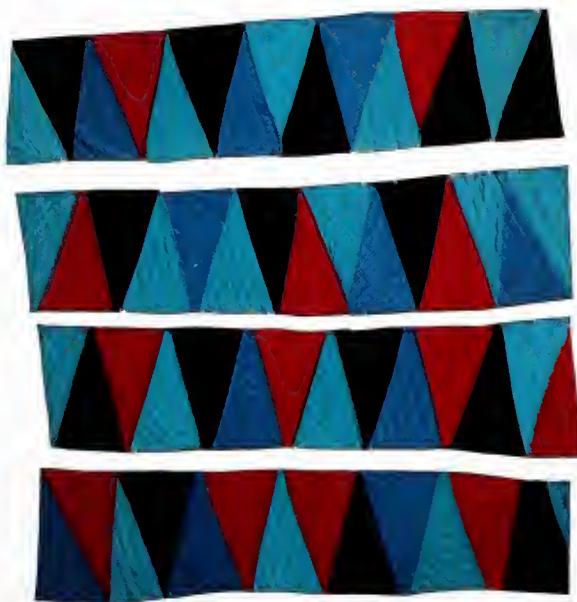
Quilted by Willia Ette Graham, 1986

16

Triangle Strip

Anonymous

c. 1870-1900



Triangle Strip Medallion

Pieced by Arbie Williams, 1991

*Quilted by Willia Ette Graham and
Johnnie A. Wade, 1991*

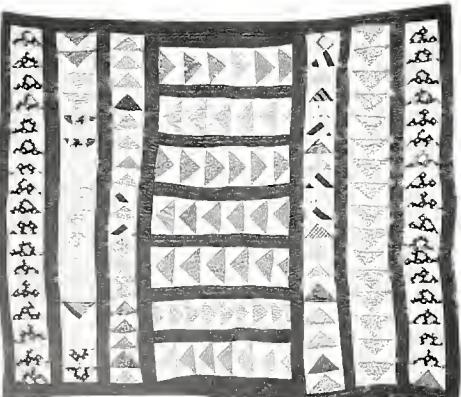




18 | Sundanese horse armor.



19 | Wild Goose Chase, Lucy Sims, c. 1925.



20 | Wild Goose Chase (variation), p. by Gussie Wells, 1984; q. by Willia Ette Graham, 1985.

(note the five cross-strip horizontal bands defining the central section of the Djerma cloth pictured in fig. 33).²⁰ Like the Djerma cloth, the quilt is punctuated with a pair of borders running lengthwise, a classic stripweaving style commonly found in Afro-traditional quilts, instead of the four-sided frame expected in the standard American tradition. Each border comprises a series of narrow strips in contrasting, alternating (red, white, red, white) colors, an Afro-traditional option (see fig. 5) that is also found in Kuba patchwork (figs. 1, 23).²¹

Willia Ette Graham commented on this type of border: “I like strips, not no solid nothin’ for a big wide border.” Wide borders, she said, lack give and tend to pucker. “Strips is so much prettier . . . looks better to me . . . you alternate your colors just like you do when you’re piecing. You get your different colors. You don’t want to have the same thing.” Arbie Williams advocates the use of this alternative to wide strips not only for borders but for alternate strips and divider bars as well, “if you want to make it fancy.”²² When she sews three strips together for a border, she may work a *Nine Patch* or other patterned block into the corners (fig. 43).²³

The *Wild Goose Chase*,  a popular early²⁴ pattern in American patchwork, can be found in nineteenth-century Sudanese horse armor of quilted patchwork (fig. 21) and in Yoruba stripweaving.²⁵ Lucy Sims (fig. 19) alternates strips of “geese” with unpieced strips, changing the direction of the triangles for her focal central strip. Gussie Wells has improvised a unique whole-cloth rendition of this pattern for her *Wild Goose Chase (variation)* (fig. 20), dividing her quilt into three major sections—a style often seen in African cloth (fig. 33). Other Afro-traditional quilts that exhibit this style can be seen in Figures 29, and 37.

Both Africans and African-Americans use a pattern called *Half Squares*,²⁶  the square divided along a diagonal. Strips of pieced *Half Squares* figure prominently in Egbo costumes,²⁷



21 | Annang-Ibibio funerary shrine cloth.



22 | **Half Squares**, p. by Anny Bell Simon, 1990; q. by Rose McDowell, 1990.

Ekuri cloth,²⁸ Cameroon room dividers,²⁹ Bushoong barkcloth assemblages (fig. 23), and many Afro-traditional quilts (see fig. 24). Blocks composed of small-scale strips of *Half Squares* often serve as the figured sections in large-scale strips (fig. 25). Rosie Lee Tompkins groups her *Half Squares* in intricate, flexible patterns of twos, fours, fives (!), sixes—framing some but not all of her groups (figs. 28, 30). In patchwork Annang-Ibibio funeral shrine banners (fig. 21), blocks of high-contrast *Half Squares* may be interspersed with blocks of dark *Half Squares*³⁰ resembling some African-American patchwork (fig. 22).³¹

More complex figural elements used in African and American textiles also show correspondences. I will discuss the *Nine Patch* (the foundation for innumerable American patterns), the *Roman Stripe*, and two patterns of alternating dark and light triangles, *Broken Dishes* and *Hourglass*. Finally, I will discuss two families of intricate patterns, *Log Cabin* and *Irish Chain*.

The *Nine Patch*, perhaps the most common American patchwork pattern, figures prominently in African surface design.³² It is an important feature in the embroidered robes of the elite throughout Muslim West Africa, where—with the corners and center as the figure—it is called *House of Five*. The number five is a charm against the evil eye.³³ This configuration of the *Nine Patch* design is also one of the *nsibidi* signs of the leopard and the multiplicity of its spots. *Nsibidi*, the

23 | Bushoong patchwork fragment.



24

Medallion

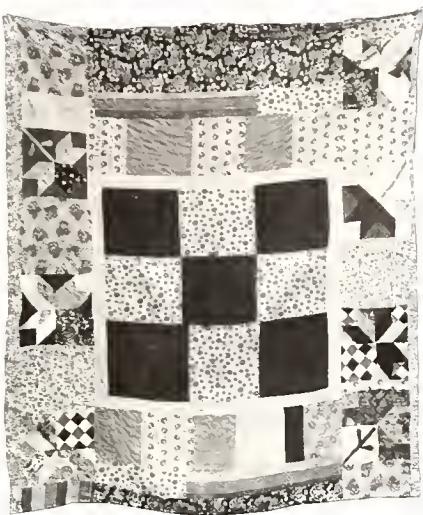
*Pieced by Sherry Byrd, 1991
Quilted by Irene Bankhead, 1991*

25

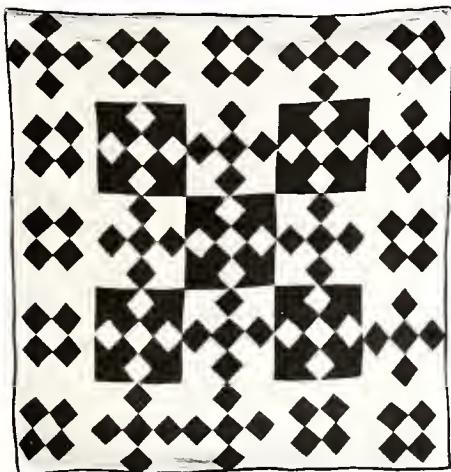
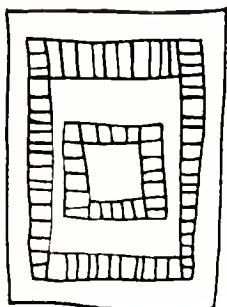
Double Strip

*Pieced by Bernice Shaw, 1950-60
Quilted by Willia Ette Graham
and Johnnie A. Wade, 1989*





26 | *Nine Patch Medallion*,
Fields family, 1940-50.



27 | *Elder Jackson Quilt*, Bessie
Moore, 1950s.

ancient script of the Ejagham of Nigeria, predates western contact in West Africa by several centuries. Recurrent *nsibidi* motifs were chalked on walls, incised on calabashes, and hammered on brass containers, as well as embroidered, appliqued, painted, and resist dyed on cloth.³⁴ The *Nine Patch* is also found in the embroidery and engraving of the Kuba, for whom nine is a sacred number,³⁵ and is represented in a Ghanaian *Adinkra* sign—a motif used to stamp cloth.³⁶

In Afro-traditional patchwork, *Nine Patch* blocks may be featured in a prominent medallion (Fields family quilt, fig. 26; Bessie Moore, fig. 27), assembled into strip-module arrangements (Maudra Walker, fig. 29; Emily Kirby, fig. 31), or presented in an overall repeated-block format (fig. 32). In the Fields and Moore medallion quilts, the central *Nine Patch* is set into the quilt in the style of African medallion textiles, in which medallion-specific strips are used to create the central decorative focus (see Djerma cloth, fig. 33). This correspondence between African and African-American formats is of particular interest because English and American medallion-style quilts generally employ a *Log Cabin*-like arrangement of progressive borders around the central medallion (see figs. 11, 14, 24, and diagram).

Fields adopts a short cut to the African-style medallion format, piecing a single, wide, central strip that includes the entire medallion, rather than a number of medallion-specific strips as in the Djerma cloth. Moore's quilt follows the African model more completely, her medallion emerging as the three central full-length medallion-specific strips are set together.³⁷

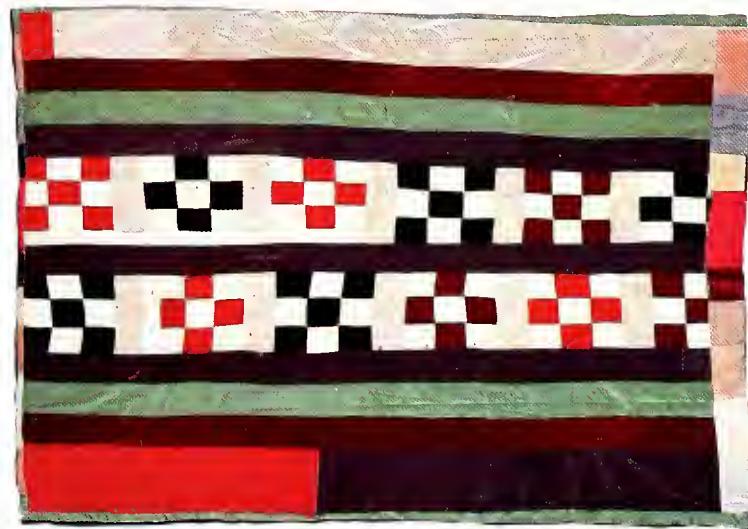
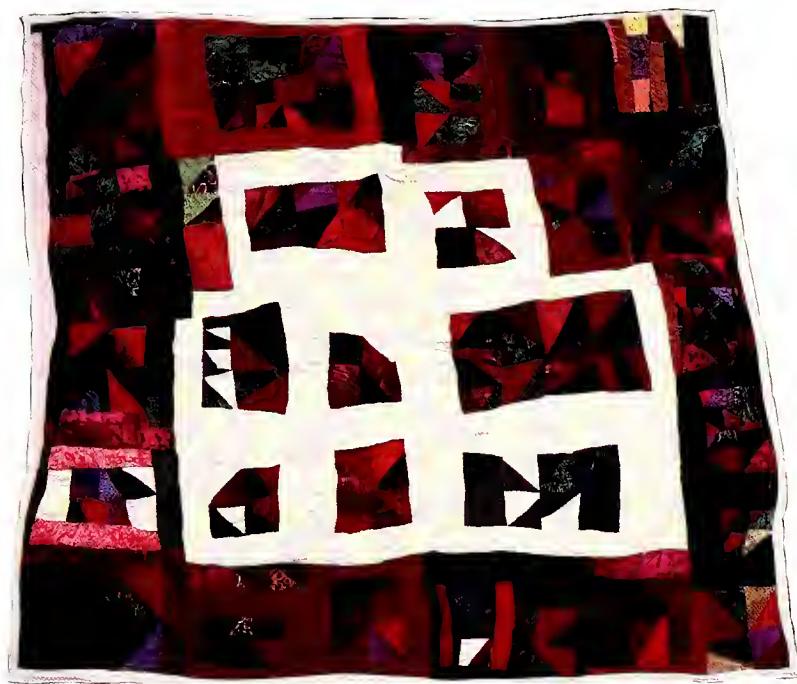
The Kirby and Walker quilts also employ strip modules. Kirby (fig. 31) has used bright colors, checks, plaids, and reds for divider bars in contrast to her more somber *Nine Patch* blocks of solid colors (exclusive of red), and has cross-strip aligned these bars, traversing the quilt with bright bands (her strips run lengthwise). Walker (fig. 29) alternates red and black blocks

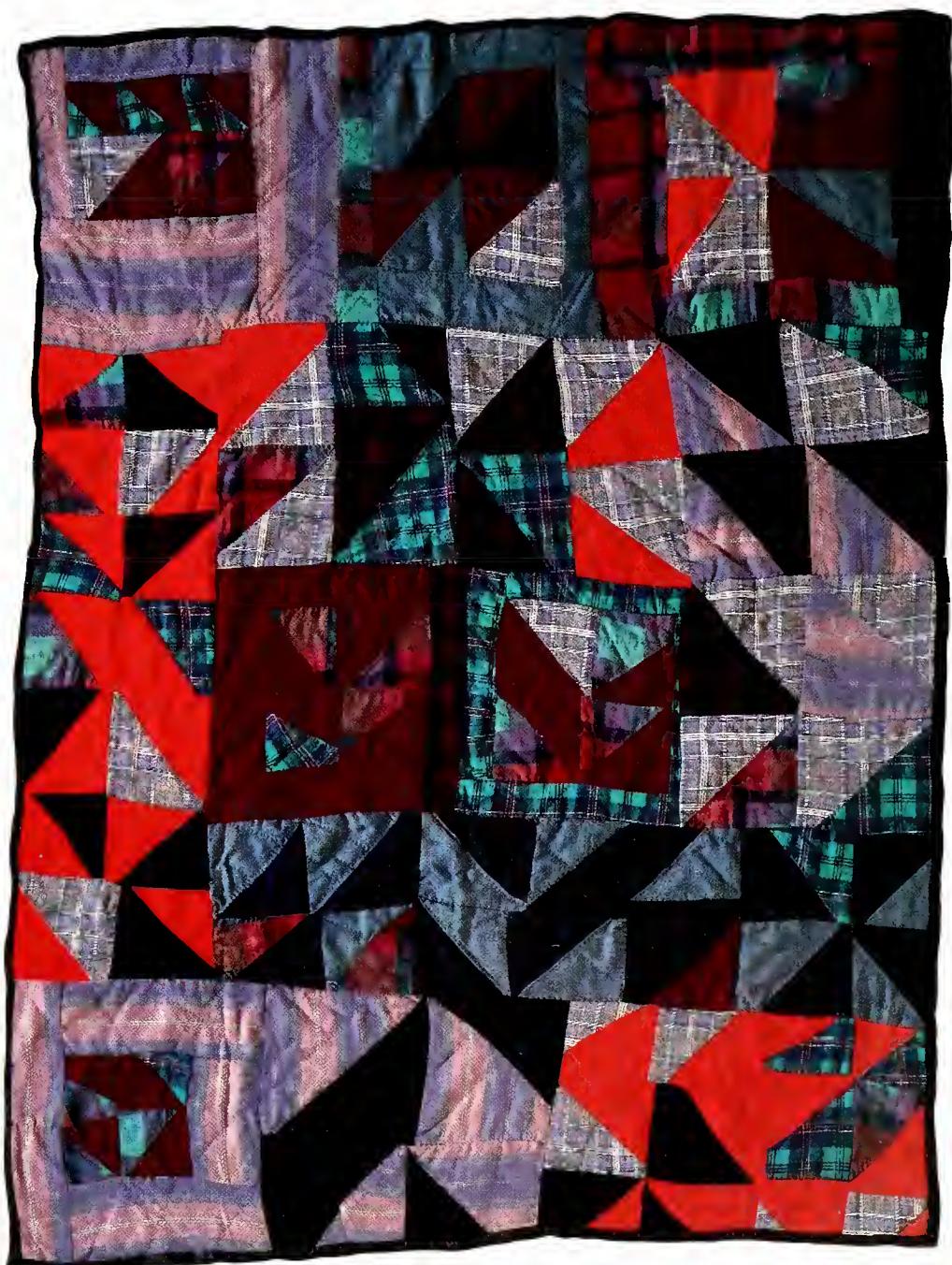
28 *Medallion*

*Pieced by Rosie Lee Tompkins, 1987
Quilted by Irene Bankhead, 1987*

29 *Nine Patch Strip*

*Maudra Walker
Date unknown*



*Half Squares Four Patch**Pieced by Rosie Lee Tompkins, 1989**Quilted by Irene Bankhead, 1990*

31

Nine Patch Strip

Emily Kirby

Date unknown

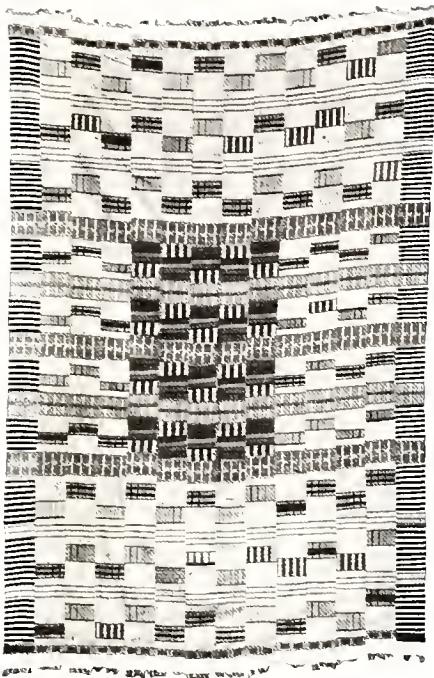
32

Nine Patch

Pieced by Mattie Pickett, 1985

Quilted by Willia Ette Graham, 1986





33 | Stripwoven Djerma cloth.

both within and between strips using tricky maneuvers whereby reddish-brown substitutes for red, and—in the brown section—red substitutes for black, as she presumably juggles her remaining supply of these colors of fabric. Evidence of an alternation esthetic, basic to African and African-American textile traditions, is strengthened by these maneuvers. Alternating patterns both within and between strips are fundamental to much Ghanaian *Kente* cloth and can be found in surviving eighteenth-century Bakongo and Angolese raffia mats³⁸ and in an *Adinkra* symbol used by the Asante people of Ghana to stamp cloth.³⁹

A *Nine Patch* variation  which sets the squares on the diagonal appears in Kuba embroidery, where it is used as a repeated-block motif.⁴⁰ A second, highly improvisational and embroidered African version of this design organizes blocks into strips with a medallion center and a pair of borders.⁴¹

The *Roman Stripe*,  in which strips of fabric are assembled into blocks that are rotated 90 degrees as they are set together, is another familiar American patchwork pattern which is used in block format in Kuba patchwork.⁴² It is popular in Afro-traditional quilts. Rose R. McDowell (fig. 34) devised a variation of this pattern in which the blocks are rotated within—but not between—strips, experimenting with a rendition of the design in which small squares are set at the ends of some of the (Roman) stripes. She liked her innovation and included it in the quilt, intending to expand on the idea in a future work.

The triangle patterns in the American quilts shown here, *Broken Dishes*, *Half-Squares*, *Hourglass*, *Triangle Strip*, and *Wild Goose Chase*, are widely used in African surface design. In the wall paintings by women in the most remote corners of West Africa, Margaret Courtney-Clarke found the pattern called *Broken Calabash*, a variable design composed of alternating dark and light triangles.⁴³ In American patchwork, one of the

34

Roman Stripe

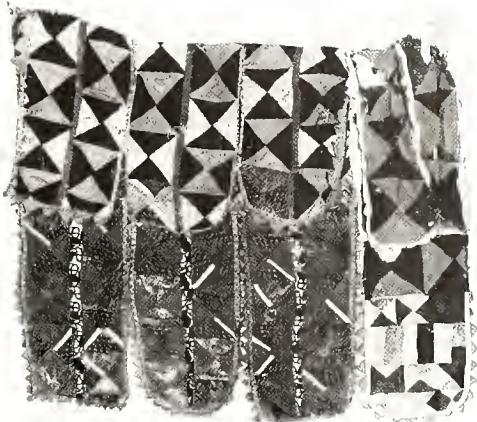
*Pieced by Rose R. McDowell, 1990
Quilted by Willia Ette Graham
and Johnnie A. Wade, 1990*

35

Broken Dishes

*Pieced by Sarah T. Turnage
Quilted by Mary Thompson
and Aurelia Foster, 1990*





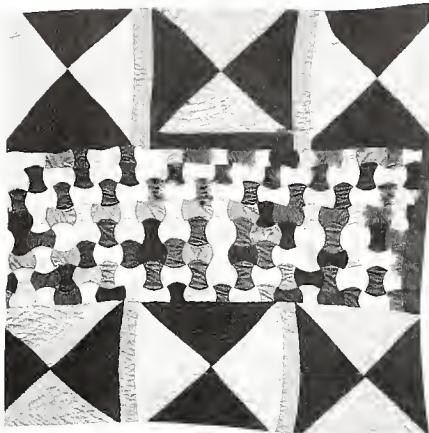
36 | Yoruba dance apron.

basic dark/light alternating triangle patterns is called *Broken Dishes* (fig. 35). A related American quilt pattern of alternating dark and light triangles appears in an *Adinkra* stamp called *A Piece of Broken Pottery*.⁴⁴ An in-depth comparison of African and American pattern names might illuminate the relationship between the two sets of traditions.

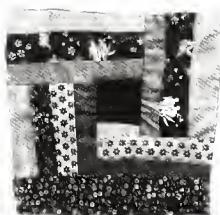
The *Hourglass* pattern pervades African art forms. It has been found on textiles discovered at the Bandiagara archaeological site in Mali as well as on a robe collected on the Benin coast of Nigeria before 1659 by the German merchant Christoph Weickmann.⁴⁵ Picton and Mack show a cotton patchwork textile, possibly from the Ivory Coast, in which strips of *Hourglass* patchwork alternate with unpieced strips.⁴⁶ The *Hourglass* also shows up in patchwork in Bakuba ceremonial skirts,⁴⁷ Egungun masquerade costumes,⁴⁸ Nigerian funerary shrine cloths (fig. 21),⁴⁹ a Kpwesi chief's robe⁵⁰ and Fulani quilted horse armor.⁵¹

The American Museum of Natural History has a nineteenth-century example of a Yoruba man's ceremonial dance apron (fig. 36)⁵² that is pieced of strips of *Hourglass* patchwork blocks and finished in one corner with strips of *Bars* and progressively smaller-scale *Hourglass* blocks, apparently using scraps and/or leftover patchwork ("restructuring"⁵³). Both shifts in scale and "restructuring" are common African-American practices. Greatly enlarged *Nine Patch* blocks can be found in two corners of Mattie Pickett's *Nine Patch* (fig. 32). Rosie Lee Tompkins includes a single corner of *Bars* patchwork in her *Medallion* (fig. 28) and effects radical shifts in scale in both her *Strip* (fig. 9) and her *Half Squares Four Patch* (fig. 30).

Surviving patchwork Kuba textiles, taken together, contain all of the elements of the block-style American quilt, often in variations found primarily among African-American quiltmakers. In one Bakuba mat, *Hourglass* patchwork sections are arranged in rectangular blocks of three rows of five



37 | *Hourglass/Double Bitted Axe Strip*, p. by Dymon Moreland, 1988; q. by Irene Bankhead, 1989.



40 | *Log Cabin (variation)* block, Laura Jackson Culp, 1960-80.

instead of the usual standard-traditional 3x3 (*Nine Patch*) or 5x5 square blocks. As in many American quilts, these blocks follow a checkerboard alternation pattern (blocks of black and undyed triangles alternate with blocks of black and red triangles).⁵⁴ In Afro-traditional quiltmaking, rectangular blocks and arrangements other than those based on the *Nine Patch* are fairly common.⁵⁵

The *Hourglass* pattern, popular among Afro-traditional quiltmakers, is often juxtaposed with other designs. Mixing patterns is another option shared by African (see figs. 20, 39) and African-American textile makers.⁵⁶ Arbie Williams embellishes her *Triangle Strip Medallion* (fig. 17) with corner *Hourglass* blocks. Willia Ette Graham includes a frame of *String Hourglass* blocks in her *Rocky Road to Kansas Medallion* (fig. 14). Dymon Moreland juxtaposes strips of *Hourglass* blocks with a second pattern found in African surface design, *Double Bitted Axe* (fig. 37).⁵⁷



The African-American *Log Cabin (variation)* in Figure 38 is different from the *Log Cabin* patterns used in standard-traditional American quiltmaking but similar to a motif that shows up in Mende stripweaving (fig. 39).⁵⁸



A second *Log Cabin* variation

unfamiliar in standard-traditional American quiltmaking,

is used by African-American quiltmakers Laura Jackson Culp (fig. 40), Mattie Lean Kelly, and Maddie Gaston.⁵⁹ Neither pattern appears in Brackman's *Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns*, but Arbie Williams remembers seeing the first on a friend's bed in Beckville, Texas, and the second is quite familiar to her; her mother used it. An African patchwork rendition of this pattern survives in a fragment of Bushoong barkcloth (fig. 23), where it was used in two versions of the repeated-block format. In one, the blocks are accentuated with squares at the intersections, a popular American block-style quilt format.



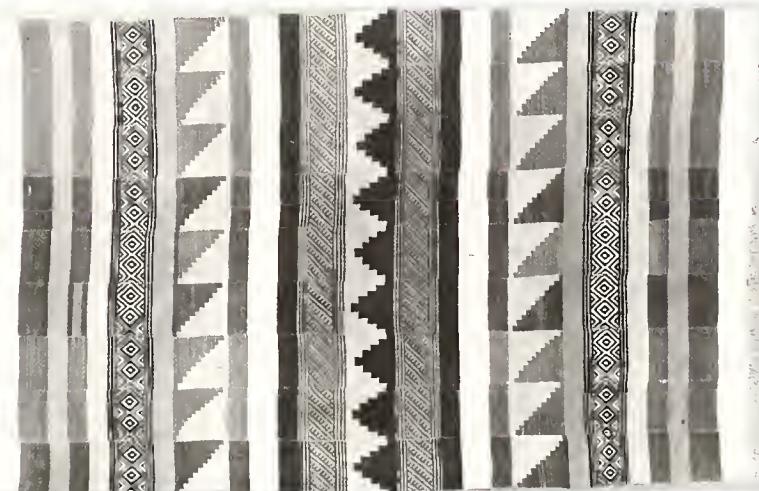
38

Log Cabin (variation)

Mrs. Wilson's mother-in-law

39

Stripwoven Mende fabric



41 *Pig in the Pen*

Maple Swift
1988



The Kuba, it appears, used the *Half Square*, *Roman Stripe*, *Hourglass*, and *Log Cabin* patterns as repeating patchwork blocks. The origin of the repeated-block style is one of the great mysteries in American quiltmaking. Certainly African textile traditions must be considered as possible sources of this distinctly American style.

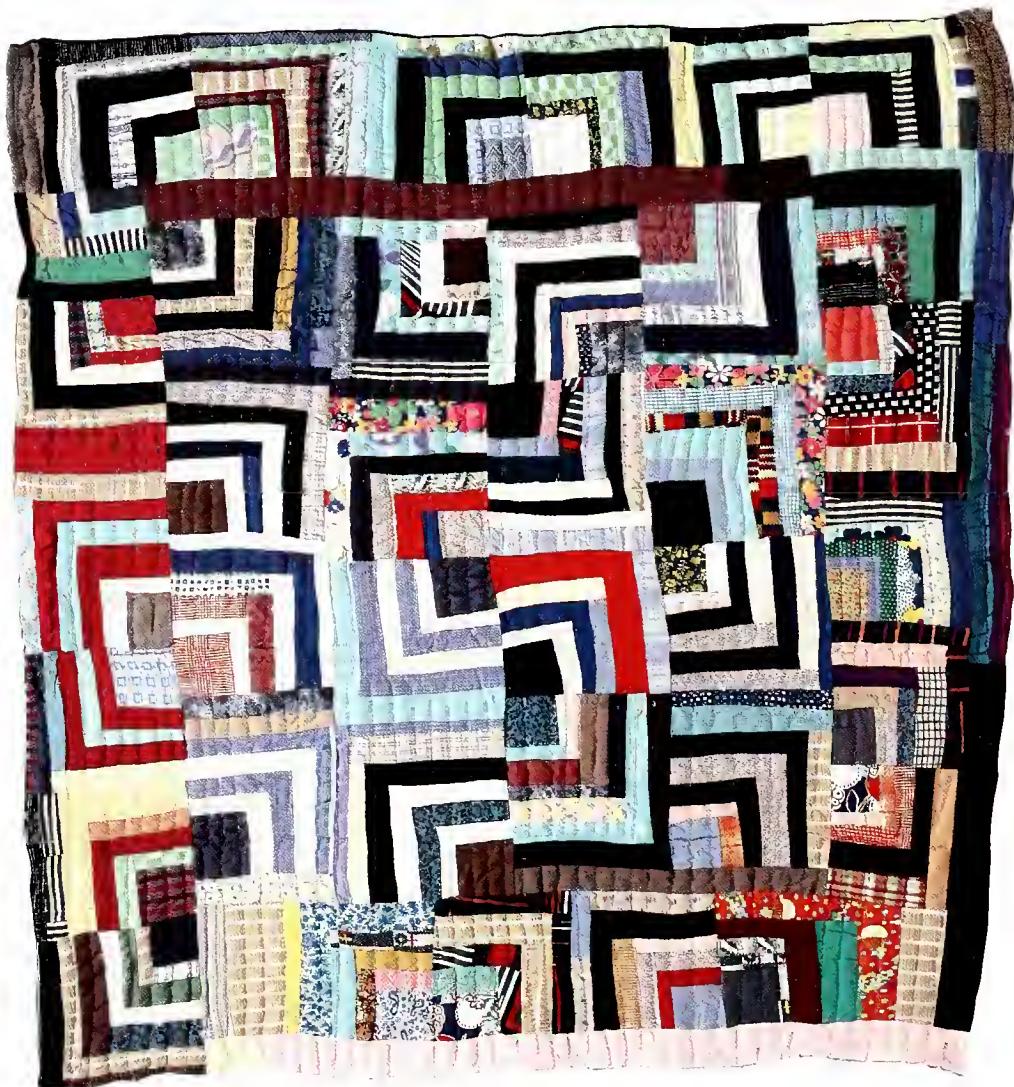
Other designs that resemble the *Log Cabin* pattern—some of which separate light and dark diagonally, as in one of the standard-traditional *Log Cabin* blocks—can be found in African cloths. (Note the other *Log Cabin*-like motif in fig. 39.⁶⁰) 

The *Corner Chimney Log Cabin*⁶¹ variation  is popular among African-American quilters (fig. 41) and also appears in African surface design.⁶² Quiltmaker Mary Thompson's mother,⁶³ called this pattern *Turkey Breast*. Another variation common among Afro-traditional quilters is the square in a square (in a square, etc.)    that Brackman catalogs as *White House Steps*. Often Afro-traditional quilters render it with great flexibility and call it *Log Cabin* or *Pig Pen*. Again, this pattern pervades African surface design. Maple Swift calls one version *Pig in the Pen* (fig. 42) and explains that the divided pens are used for weaning. 

Blacks could have learned the *Log Cabin* pattern from whites and adapted it to their esthetic, but this commonly held assumption⁶⁴ is undocumented. It is unlikely that the pattern was used by Europeans or European-Americans in their quiltmaking before they came into contact with Africans. Brackman's survey of pieced quilt patterns from the period 1775-1825 revealed no *Log Cabins*.⁶⁵ Quilt historian Jonathan Holstein estimates that the *Log Cabin* first appeared in the 1860s.⁶⁶ European-Americans might have been exposed to Afro-traditional patchwork for generations before they began to use the *Log Cabin* pattern. Furthermore, there is reason to believe that the *Log Cabin* pattern came to England from

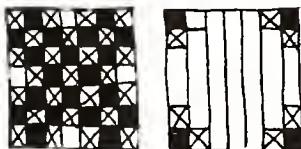
Pieced by Sara Turnage

*Quilted by Mary Thompson and
Aurelia Foster, 1990*

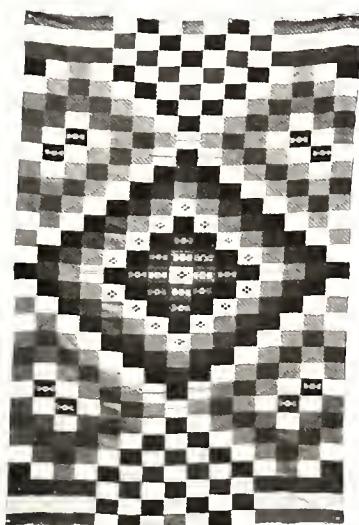




43 | *Triple Irish Chain Look-alike*,
p. by Flossie Sullivan and Arbie
Williams, 1986; q. by Willia
Ette Graham, 1986.



44 | *Triple Irish Chain*
two-block pattern.



45 | *Stripwoven cloth, Mali.*

North America; in England it was sometimes called *American Log Pattern*.⁶⁷

The Wilson *Log Cabin* was made in the 1950s, the Culp variation even more recently. Are they innovations based on a standard-traditional pattern, or African-American patterns that have been passed along since *before* the adoption of the *Log Cabin* by other Americans? Serious inquiry into American quiltmaking is in its beginnings; the study of Afro-traditional quiltmaking in its infancy. Further research should allow us to answer these questions with some certainty.

Also consider Flossie Sullivan's and Arbie Williams's *Triple Irish Chain Look-alike* (fig. 43). Sullivan started piecing this quilt; Williams finished it and added the borders. Remarkably the quiltmakers have achieved the *Irish Chain* effect by *stripping* and *diagonal alignment*, entirely unlike the standard-traditional execution of *Irish Chain* two-block patterns (fig. 45). In the Sullivan/Williams quilt, preconceived criss-crossing diagonals are implemented by offsetting colored squares in the vertical strips, a technique also used in African stripwoven textiles (fig. 44).⁶⁸ Approximate measurement has resulted in a flexible pattern. Willia Ette Graham, who was born in 1903 and who quilted the Sullivan/Williams top, says she has seen the *Irish Chain* done this “old fashioned” way as a child in Texas. If so, it is likely that we will discover older examples.

Despite its name, the *Irish Chain* pattern is referred to as “American” by English quilt historian Agnes Miall.⁶⁹ Might the cross-cultural influence have gone from black to white? Holstein attributes the nineteenth-century development of sophisticated linked blocks, whose parts joined to create larger overall designs (like the *Log Cabins* and the *Irish Chains*), to the explosion at that time of block style quilts.⁷⁰ Another possibility is that only then did African design ideas—maintained in early African-American quiltmaking—become manifest in

quilts which were destined to survive, predominantly the “better” quilts of affluent European-Americans.

While relics of African patchwork traditions lay buried in distant museums, generations of pieced quilts eluding European-American standards were, in all probability, fashioned and well-used in African-American households, leaving little trace of their existence. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, students of African-American quiltmaking,⁷¹ including pioneering proponents of the continuity of African and African-American textile traditions,⁷² proceeded from the assumption that American block patterns, including basics like the *Nine Patch* and the *Log Cabin*, were chiefly European-derived. Recently, a small sample of antique African patchwork and a body of contemporary African-American quilts conforming to African standards have surfaced in publications of African and African-American art; assumptions of European derivation are up for re-evaluation. African surface design and American patchwork bear striking resemblances to each other. African prototypes, traditionally carried as models in the mind, could have survived the African Diaspora. The proliferation of patchwork patterns in America emerged in a world peopled by blacks and whites together. The possibility of significant or preeminent African derivation of the American patchwork quilt is worthy of serious consideration.

Notes

1. The Kingdom of Kuba was outside the slaving area but the coastal regions of the former Kongo territories were not. Examples of cut-pile embroideries in European museums collected in Kongo and Angola are worked and patterned like those of the Kuba (Meurant, *Shoowa Design*, 111). It seems likely that traditional barkcloth styles were also shared by these peoples.

In fact, although West Africans arrived in North America in greater numbers, the Bantu of Central Africa comprised the largest homogeneous culture group (including a common language) among the imported Africans and are believed to have had the strongest impact on the development of African-American culture. (Holloway, "The Origins of African-American Culture," 2, 8, 9, 16, 17; Thompson, "Kongo Influences on African-American Artistic Culture," 150, 152).

2. Patches are required to cover holes that result from the pounding of the cloth. (Mack, "In Search of the Abstract," 31; Lane, "African Textile Craftsmanship," 263).

3. Sieber, *African Textiles and Decorative Arts*, 155.

4. Picton and Mack, *African Textiles*, 79 (Yoruba cloth worn by man in white hat.) This alternation style is prominent in Asante stamped (Adinkra) cloths, which often look like patchwork quilts, sharing some patterns as well as overall format (Menzel, II, figs. 438, 445-6). This format, useful in anchoring patchwork, serves no such function in Adinkra.

5. Although stripwoven cloth is, like patchwork, sewed together to make larger textiles, unfigured strips serve no such anchoring function as both figured and unfigured strips are continuous lengths of cloth. Conversely, in patchwork, unfigured strips are unpieced—or at least considerably more "solid" than pieced strips—and serve to strengthen the finished work.

6. Picton and Mack, *African Textiles*, 185; Meurant, *Shoowa Design*, 139, diag. 9. For Yoruba examples see Houlberg, "Egungun Masqueraders of the Remo Yoruba," 21.

7. See Fry, *Broken Star*, 4, fig. 2, *Bars Quilt*.

8. Houlberg, "Egungun Masqueraders of the Remo Yoruba," 21 (figure on right).

9. Rosie Lee Tompkins is a pseudonym. This quilter wishes to remain anonymous.

10. See Leon, *Who'd a Thought It*, 52. The perimeters of Tompkins' blocks are hard to find but can be traced along those lines where the scale shifts and the seams jog.

11. I contrast "Afro-traditional" with the "standard-traditional" style of American quiltmaking in an attempt to define, explore, and explicate distinguishing aspects of African-American quiltmaking. The "Afro-traditional"

category subsumes a seemingly heterogeneous mix of qualities that depart from Euro-American standards (as represented by the extant historical quilts, disproportionately the “best” quilts of middle- and upper-class quiltmakers) while conforming to norms that crosscut a broad spectrum of African cultures. The term is designed to emphasize the traditional nature of these norms among African-Americans. “Afro-traditional” is not synonymous with “African-American” quiltmaking, the majority of which is “standard-traditional” or shows both “Afro-” and “standard-traditional” characteristics.

The “everyday” quiltmaking of working-class and affluent Anglo-Americans and the quiltmaking of other cultural groups and isolated Anglo communities—categories of quiltmaking that are largely unresearched—may also vary from the “standard.”¹²

12. At her death, Brown left this textile in the form of a nearly completed quilt top. An unattached blue strip was found along with the top. Its length and proximity to the top and our understanding of Brown’s bordering style as established in a closely related quilt (Leon, *Who’d a Thought It*, 66), in which an almost identical strip is used as a border, persuaded quilter Willia Ette Graham and me to use it to border the top before quilting. For additional examples of the use of irregular strips of rectangles, see Leon, *Who’d a Thought It*, 65 (top), 66, 67, 68 (top and bottom), 74, 75 (borders), 76 (borders).

13. This West African cloth was collected in the Ivory Coast but may not have been made there.

14. A Gola war gown from Liberia also includes bands of *patchwork* bars (Siegmann, “Patchwork Gowns as State Regalia in Western Liberia,” 108).

15. Leon, “African Transformations in Afro-American Whole-quilt Patterns,” 19, fig. O.

16. De la Rue, *The Land of the Pepper Bird*, opposite 89; Lamb and Holmes, *Nigerian Weaving*, 153,157 (applique); Meurant, *Shoowa Design*, 146-7, diag. 24; Naber, *Op Expeditie met de Franchen*, 166; Picton and Mack, *African Textiles*, 170,185; Siegmann, “Patchwork Gowns as State Regalia in Western Liberia,” 108; Strong, *The African Republic of Liberia and the Belgian Congo*, 63; Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush*, 43.

17. Thompson, *African Art in Motion*, 181. The most dominant iconographic theme in the beaded cloth Cameroon masks of the Bamileke (elephant society) is the spots of the leopard, rendered as repeated isosceles triangles (Foss, “The Sign of the Leopard,” 24).

18. The jogs at the edges of the horizontal strips represent, not seams in the piecing, but tucks taken by the quilter to flatten the quilt top.

19. “Strips” designates units of construction, which may or may not also be units of design. “Stripes” are units of design only.

20. Leon, “Cross-strip Patterning in African Textiles and African-American Quilts,” *passim*; see figs. 1 and 3 for additional African examples of this style of bilaterally symmetrical pattern.

21. See also Cat. No. 204410B, National Museum of Natural History. The Bushoong example also illustrates the related use of alternating narrow strips as block dividers.

22. For an example of Williams’s use of this option in both borders and alternate strips, see Leon, “African Transformations in Afro-American Whole-quilt Patterns,” 18, fig. 22.

23. See also the medallion frame on *The Mary Bright Quilt* (Grudin, *Stitching Memories: African-American Story Quilts*, 73).

24. Brackman, “A Chronological Index to Pieced Quilt Patterns,” 111.

25. Picton and Mack, *African Textiles*, 117.

26. Quiltmaker Willie Mae Chatman's name for this pattern, learned from her mother in Homer, Louisiana.

27. Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush*, 43.

28. Ibid, 254.

29. Thompson, *African Art in Motion*, 186, plate 226.

30. See also *Nigeria*, #51, 1956, 319.

31. The oldest photo of a spirit house draped in patchwork funerary cloth was taken at the beginning of the twentieth century. No attempt is made to protect these shrines from the elements and few cloths last longer than two rainy seasons (Salmons, "Funerary Shrine Cloths of the Annang Ibibio," 122, 134, 137), but it seems likely that similar banners have draped funerary shrines for some time.

32. The symbols used in African surface design often appear in a great variety of media. (Crowe, "Geometric Symmetries in African Art," 191-2; Flam, "Signs and Symbols in Traditional Metal Art of the Western Sudan," 19; Appiah, "Akan Symbolism," 64; Aremu, "Yoruba Traditional Weaving," 8)

33. Kriger, "Robes of the Sokoto Caliphate," 78. For a discussion of a possible example of the protective use of an appliqued number in an African-American quilt, see Leon, "The Francis Sheppard Fours Quilt."

34. Thompson, *African Art in Motion*, 181.

35. Meurant, *Shoowa Design*, 55,112,189.

36. Mato, *Clothed in Symbol*, figs. 130, 211.

37. Access to a body of nineteenth-century Afro-traditional quilts—treasures that first now are being sought after by historians—will, of course, greatly facilitate our evaluation of the theory of African derivation. Modular medallions are among the characteristics we might expect to find in earlier Afro-traditional patchwork.

38. Brauholtz, *Sir Hans Sloane and Ethnography*, plates 7,8.

39. Mato, *Clothed in Symbol*, fig. 208.

40. Meurant, *Shoowa Design*, 174, diags. 1,9.

41. Ibid., 55.

42. Meurant, *Traumzeichen*, 78-79.

43. Courtney-Clarke, *African Canvas*, 35, 43-45, 164.

44. Mato, *Clothed in Symbol*, fig. 37.

45. Gilfoyle, *Patterns of Life*, 43. See also: Aronson, "History of Cloth Trade in the Niger Delta," 96; Bedaux and Bolland, "Medieval Textiles from the Tellem Caves in Central Mali," 68, 69.

46. Picton and Mack, *African Textiles*, 186.

47. Sieber, *African Textiles and Decorative Arts*, 156.

48. Nigeria, October, 1960 (special issue), 86.

49. Salmons, "Funerary shrine cloths of the Annang Ibibio," 131; *Nigeria*, October, 1960, 86.

50. Strong, *The African Republic of Liberia and the Belgian Congo*, 63.

51. Picton and Mack, *African Textiles*, 182-3.

52. Discovered by anthropologist Greg Day in his research on African and African-American patchwork.

53. See Leon, *Who'd a Thought It*, 63-73; "Cut It Down the Middle and Send It to the Other Side," 73.

54. Lane, "African Textile Craftsmanship," 265-6.

55. See Leon, *Who'd a Thought It*, 68, fig.53.

56. Wahlman, *Ten Afro-American Quilters*.
57. In an uncanny coincidence, these two patterns are also juxtaposed in a Kongo painting on bark panel illustrated in Leuzinger, 172, plate 47.
58. See also *African Arts*, 8/87, 20(4), 36.
59. Kelly and Gaston use the structure of the pattern with little or no emphasis on its graphic potential (e.g. Kelly's rendition is white on white). Culp uses it graphically in an odd block in a mostly *String* quilt top. A fourth Afro-traditional example, anonymous but almost certainly from an African-American source, enlarges the pattern for a whole-quilt design.
60. Irene Foreman's *Stairstep Quilt* (pictured in Day, "Afro-Carolinian Art," 15), a *Log Cabin* variation in which there is no chimney (see endnote 61), is similar to this Mende motif but assembled in such a way that it occasionally gives the effect of the pattern in fig. 38.
61. The small (traditionally red) square that is usually at the center of the standard-traditional *Log Cabin* block is called the chimney.
62. Meurant, *Shoowa Design*, 35, 106.
63. Tish Grey of Baucum, Arkansas.
64. Lankford, *Patchwork Quilts: Deep South Traditions*, 5; McDonald, "Because I Needed Some Cover," 1; Vlach, *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts*, 73.
65. Brackman, "Chronological Index to Pieced Quilt Patterns," 106.
66. Holstein, "The American Block Quilt," 26.
67. Miall, *Patchwork Old and New*, 49; see also Hechtlinger, *American Quilts, Quilting, and Patchwork*, 65.
68. See Wass and Murnane, *African Textiles*, 29.
69. Miall, *Patchwork Old and New*, 48.
70. Holstein, "The American Block Quilt," 25.
71. Ertel, "Quilting a Heritage," 108; Freeman, "Keepsakes," 114; McDonald, "Because I Needed Some Cover," pp. 1, 55; Roach, *The Traditional Quiltmaking of North Louisiana Women*, 59, 216, 231; Yabsley, *Texas Quilts, Texas Women*, 59.
72. Thompson, "Making Rooms Righteous," 4; Vlach, *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts*, 67, 73; Wahlman, "African Symbolism in Afro-American Quilts," 69, 72, 75.

Biographies of the Quiltmakers



Cora Lee Hall Brown (1900-1981) lived all of her life on the outskirts of Mt. Enterprise, Texas. She learned to quilt from her mother and grandmother. A prolific quiltmaker, she gave them freely to her family during her lifetime while accumulating a prodigious store herself. At her death, she left fifteen quilts to her only granddaughter and one each, as remembrances, to the sixty-four children of her thirteen brothers and sisters.



Mary Lue Brown (1891-1979) grew up in Giddings and Austin, Texas, and lived most of her life in Dallas. In 1969 she moved to Riverside, California, where she spent her last years at the home of her daughter, Elfreda Ford.

In college, Elfreda befriended Helen Nathaniel, whose parents had died when she was young. When Helen had her first child, Mother Brown (as she was called) decided to stay with Helen to help her with the baby. The two women formed a lifelong bond.

The *Strip* quilt was a gift from Mother Brown to Helen, probably sent to her in San Francisco from Dallas in the 1940s. The family used this quilt more than any other, keeping it on the sofa to wrap in when watching T.V. They called it "the loud quilt."



Sherry Byrd (1951-) started helping her grandmother (the local seamstress in the country near Fairfield, Texas) tack quilts when she was six or seven years old. By age eight or nine, she was piecing clothes for her dolls from her grandmother's scraps.

She worked in restaurants from the age of eleven, doing everything from dishwashing to cooking. She graduated from Sam Houston State University in 1972 and taught school briefly when she was newly married. She moved to Houston around 1973 before her first child was born, and to California in 1977. Despite a strong desire to make beautiful things with her hands, she only occasionally finds time to piece quilts; eight children and a home sewing job take up most of her time. She can piece a quilt in eight hours if she "goes straight at it." She works her fastest when she "sees the colors falling together." Once she knows that the quilt is going to look good, she gets excited and wants to see the end results.



Charles Cater (1928-) grew up in Bibb County, Georgia. He was close to his grandmother who taught him to sew when he was five years old. By the age of seven, he had made his first quilt. He moved to California in the early 1940s and raised six children in Oakland. He and his wife made quilts to sell; Cater pieced the tops and his wife helped him tack them. In the 1980s he ran a notions shop in Oakland called "Cater's Nook," where he sold quilts. When most productive, he made fifty to seventy-five quilts a year. Cater was one of six quiltmakers featured in the 1991 KGO television production, "A Stitch In Time."

Sometimes he gives a quilt away. He will "see people sometime and just know that they need it." When he has that feeling, he will give them a quilt.



Laura Jackson Culp (1909-) grew up in the country in Greenwich, Mississippi and Hughes, Arkansas. She did field work for most of her life, starting to pick cotton—into a flour sack—at the age of two. Her mother taught her to piece the *Nine Patch* at age five or six. She moved to California in 1961 and now lives in Richmond.



Willia Ette Graham (1903-) grew up in the country around Henderson, Texas. She started quilting with her mother when she was about thirteen. She raised two children in Henderson, taught school in a one-room schoolhouse, and was employed as a domestic and beautician. She moved to Oakland in 1944 and worked in the housekeeping department at the University of California. After her retirement in 1971, she pieced quilts to keep herself busy. Finding that people wanted to buy her quilts, she's been making and selling them ever since.

Graham arranges her quilt pieces to keep the viewer's eye moving, to "change it up, pick your eye back up again, like flashin' a light in your face in the dark." Not wanting her quilts to look flat, she puts "something in there to lift your sight up, keep you searchin' for somethin' else to see." She has demonstrated quilting at several museum exhibitions and was honored in 1987 for her quiltmaking by the Women's Foundation in San Francisco. She was one of six quilters featured in the 1991 KGO television production, "A Stitch In Time!" ABC also did a network program about her life and the mayor of Oakland proclaimed February 29, 1988, to be "Willia Ette Graham Day."



Ernestine Jordan (1945-) has lived in the country in Rusk County near Henderson, Texas, all of her life.

Emily Kirby (1896-1982) grew up in the country in Texas and moved to California sometime in the early 1940s. She did all of her quiltmaking by hand and, as she worked, liked to tell stories about how things used to be. Her granddaughter-in-law, Sharon Stinson, remembers "Granny Kirby"—as everyone called her—talking about taking in laundry to make ends meet and how the whole family crowded into the horse and buggy on Sunday to go to church, the center of their social life. In her later days Kirby worked on quilts all the time. Her arthritis was so bad that she would often stay in bed, cutting and sewing quilt pieces from scraps people brought her. When she was ready to quilt, she put up her wooden horses and neighbors came to join her. She sold quilts to supplement her income—gaining customers by word of mouth—and was still making them when she died, well into her eighties.



Carrie Lewis (1936-) grew up in the country near Tulip, Arkansas. She learned to piece from her mother and learned to quilt from her grandmother. She moved to California in 1965 and now lives in Fresno.



Rose R. McDowell (1914-) grew up in the country near Wilmington, North Carolina. She lost her mother when she was two years old: "I don't remember my mother but my grandmother had quilts that she made. My cousin's wife wanted this quilt, but my grandmother wouldn't give it to her. She said my mother made it, she wanted to keep it—that particular one—for me. When you can't remember your mother, it seem like you could just get something she made, you feel more close. That was something my mother done and I wanted to keep it."

She watched her grandmother and her aunt quilt and started learning to sew when she was seven but didn't start quiltmaking until, as an adult, she had an opportunity to salvage some velvets and other fancy materials that had been used for dressing windows and were variously faded. She likes to work with scraps: "I don't like to cut up material in a lot of little small pieces, but when it's already cut, well that's O.K." If a piece fits in differently from what she had in mind: "I'll look at it. If it looks all right, I'll let it stay."



Bessie Moore (1910-) was raised in Rockmart, Georgia. She learned to quilt from her mother, starting when she was seven or eight years old. Her mother would cut out little pieces for Moore and her sister to sew together: "That was fun to us." If they did it wrong her mother would take it apart and have them do it over, but without making them feel bad: "She was always encouraging, letting us know we could do it. We were poor but we had a lot of love."

Her recent quilts are mostly standard-traditional. She doesn't know why she stopped making the more irregular kind but she remembers them fondly: "It's been a long time. Those 'put-togethers,' they usually turn out the prettiest, to me."

She named the *Elder Jackson Quilt* for an "old minister [who] used to come to Corcoran [California], teachin' at our church. He was the first one slept under the quilt after I got it made."



Dymon Moreland (1910-) has lived all of her life in the country near Henderson, Texas. She learned to quilt by watching her mother and aunts, doing her first piecing when she was seventeen years old. She likes to mix patterns in her quilts.



Bettie Phillips (1916-) grew up in the country around Castle, Oklahoma. She learned to quilt from her mother when she was fourteen. Her mother involved the whole family. In the summertime when school was out, the eight girls and three boys would all be kept busy doing two or three quilts a day. The women in the community also worked together at one another's houses. Phillips remembers their making the *Friendship* quilt. Each woman would make a block, all different designs, and give it to the lady who was hosting the quilting. Then they would all get together and quilt it. Phillips tried to get that started in California but was unsuccessful because "you can't get these ladies to do nothin'."

Phillips never stopped quilting. By the time she married she had made three quilts with which to set up house. She can piece a quilt in a few days, cutting one day and sewing the next. She tried selling quilts when she moved to Los Angeles in 1938, but she never earned much for them. She raised two children, did domestic work, and worked in canneries, hotels, restaurants, and hospitals. In 1967 she settled in Oakland. She says that since her retirement she doesn't do anything but piece quilts and sew. She was one of six quiltmakers featured in the 1991 KGO television production, "A Stitch In Time."

Phillips gives some of her quilts away. "I give a girl a quilt here about three years ago. She didn't have no money and she didn't have no cover cause I went there to see if she was sick. She had one little thin blanket and had her bedspread folded in two folds. The next day I brought her a quilt and she just cried."



Mattie Pickett (1907-) grew up on the plantation in Montgomery, Alabama, where her forebears had lived in slavery. She learned to quilt from her grandmother, who died before Mattie was ten years old. She sees quilt patterns as suggestions for construction, rather than unbreakable rules: "You can change the pattern. If you don't want it thataway, then you turn round and change it around." Back in Alabama, she and her neighbors went from one house to another to quilt. She raised her three children in Montgomery before she moved to California. She gives her quilts to her family and to poor people who "need cover." Concerned about the homeless, she has been considering "quilting some quilts and goin' down the street and seein' who is layin' out there in the wintertime and give 'em a quilt. That's what I want to do. This year." She believes that when you help people you are helping God.

She has lived in San Francisco since the 1970s. She is a healer. People call her to come to their homes for prayer and laying on of hands.



Bernice Shaw (1903-1986) was from Terry, Louisiana. She moved to California in the 1940s and supplemented her income by sewing. At the time of her death she lived in Emeryville.

Anny Bell Simon (1914-) has lived in the country near Cushing, Texas, all of her life except for a period after her house burned down and she stayed with her daughter in Houston. Losing a house to fire is not uncommon in southern black communities, and it is customary for quiltmakers to give a quilt to a family who suffers this misfortune. Simon herself has given quilts to neighbors on three such occasions.

She began to work on quilts as part of her household chores when she was about thirteen years old. Her mother would cut the patterns and lay them out for her: "All we had to do is just sew 'em together." Soon she was piecing quilts on her own: "I like to beautify them pieces. They get pretty when they come together."

Lucy Sims (c.1874-1941) lived in Mt. Zion and Galveston, Texas. During the winter she was always piecing or she and her neighbors would meet at one another's houses to quilt and have a midday dinner. The women took turns quilting and cooking or might sit on the sidelines, piecing. Sims had quilting frames suspended from the bedroom ceiling on ropes; they had to be put up at night. The winter weather was bitter cold and blankets were unheard of; people made their own quilts. The *Wild Goose Chase*, her only surviving quilt, was given to her daughter, Texanna Jones, soon after it was completed, around 1925.



Flossie Sullivan (1925-) grew up in rural Calvert, Texas. Her sister pieced quilts when they were growing up, but Sullivan didn't get interested in quiltmaking until she was an adult. She graduated from Tuskegee Institute in 1944 and moved to California in 1945. She doesn't like blankets, preferring to sleep under cotton quilts. She lives in Oakland.

Maple Swift (1944-) grew up in a quiltmaking family in and around rural Ozan, Arkansas, where she has lived all of her life. When she was eleven or twelve she got interested in the quiltmaking of her live-in grandmother: "I'd kneel and get in her way and that's how I really learned." Her grandmother started her off with the *Nine Patch* pattern and showed her how to strip a quilt, putting different colors together so that they would "show up." From the first, she loved to make quilts. She found that the quiltmakers in the community could provide her with new patterns which her mother would help her cut and assemble: "I was easy to catch on. They could show me somethin' once or twice and they wouldn't be bothered with me askin' them no more."

She did factory work, trained as a cook, and prepared meals in a school cafeteria while raising her family, until her arthritis became too disabling for her to continue cooking. Now she cares for small children in her home and makes quilts to support herself. Most days she is able to spend four to six hours piecing and tacking quilts. She gets intensely involved: "I get about halfway through with one and it go to lookin' real good to me—I'm just anxious to get through so I can see what it really look like."

Her recent quilts are standard-traditional. She can machine-piece an eight-pointed star block in a half hour without measuring or using a pattern. She sells her quilts, gives them to her relatives (she has nine brothers and sisters), and gives quilts to people who have been "burned out"—have lost their homes in a fire. She can tack two quilts a day "and still see about my babies and cook in between times." Last year she made and sold about fifty quilts.

Sarah T. Turnage (1905-c.1980) spent the latter part of her life in San Francisco, where she was known as "Mother T." Her friend Julia Commer remembers her piecing quilts continually. Commer believes Turnage was from Mississippi.

Maudra Walker lived in San Mateo, California, at the time of her death. She is believed to have been from Oklahoma.



Gussie Wells (1901-) grew up in the country near Princeton, Louisiana. From the age of nine she helped her grandmother quilt. At sixteen, during World War I, she worked in the sawmills. In 1921 she moved to Galveston, Texas, where she did domestic and hotel work while raising her daughter. She never made any quilts by herself as a young woman. She left Texas for New York City in 1927 where she did housework, ran a candy store, and worked at sewing machines in clothing and burlap bag factories. In 1945 she came to San Francisco. She moved back and forth between the city and the country, owning several houses, a restaurant in San Francisco, and ranches in Santa Rosa and Merced. She retired in 1963 and settled in Oakland in 1977.

She took up quilting again in her eighties after she met Arbie Williams who had come to work for her to help care for Wells's ninety-four-year-old mother. Williams was making quilts and Wells began making them with her. She donated them to her church when they had sales and sent them to her family in Louisiana and to missions in Alabama and Mississippi for distribution to the poor. In 1991 the National Endowment for the Arts awarded Wells and Williams National Heritage Fellowships for their quiltmaking.



Arbie Williams (1916-) grew up on farms and ranches in West Texas, where her father worked as a hired hand. Her mother taught her to sew when she was eight years old. She started piecing quilts by age ten or twelve. She married right out of school and raised nine children. As a young woman in the early 1940s, she organized a quilting club in a little railroad camper's community in Beckville, Texas, where she and her family were living. The women met in one another's houses in the summer and did a quilt or two a week. In the wintertime they pieced separately and kept their work hidden, so as to surprise one another the following summer. Each year they tried to make one special quilt, like a *Lone Star*, a *Log Cabin*, or an *Ocean Wave*.

Over the years, Williams has worked as a cocktail waitress, maid, cook, nurse, seamstress, beautician, and farmer in addition to being a mother and housewife. She settled in Oakland, California, in 1945. She took up quilting again after her children were grown. Williams rekindled Gussie Wells's interest in quiltmaking by taking a box of scraps to her house: "She got to fumblin' with them pieces and we ain't never had so much fun. She the one taught me how to piece on the sewin' machine. She made that top so *quick*." For years after that, until Wells got too arthritic to sew, they worked together on quilts. Williams gave most of hers to her family.

At seventy-six, Williams volunteers at a local hospital, supervising a group of elderly women who are making patchwork quilts for AIDS babies. "These women all know how to piece quilts," Williams explains, "I just started it. I'm sort of a guide." Williams was one of six quiltmakers featured in the KGO television production, "A Stitch In Time." In 1991 the National Endowment for the Arts awarded Williams and Wells National Heritage Fellowships for their quiltmaking.

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ERRATA

Photography credits, line 12 For 204,410A read 204410A.

Photography credits, line 115 For Hansjerg read Hansjorg.

Page 2, line 3 For figs. 25,29,31,34 read figs. 25,29,41.

Page 2, line 23 For fig. 12 read fig. 6.

Page 3, line 26 For fig. 12 read fig. 6.

Page 4, line 5 For fig. 42 read fig. 43.

Page 14, line 9 For fig. 5 read fig. 6.

Page 14, line 23 For fig. 21 read fig. 18.

Page 14, line 31 For Figures 29 and 37 read Figures 13,29 and 37.

Page 23, line 16 Delete (fig. 21).

Page 24, line 10 For figs. 20,39 read figs. 23,39.

Page 27, line 12 For fig. 41 read fig. 42.

Page 27, line 20 For fig. 42 read fig. 41.

Page 28, line 2 For Sara Turnage read Sarah T.

Page 29, line 16 Turnage.

Page 29, line 19 For fig. 45 read fig. 44.

Page 32, note 20 For fig. 44 read fig. 45.

Add parentheses in (see figs. 1 and 3 for additional African examples of this style of bilaterally symmetrical pattern.)

